

# Captioning Presentation Shorthand Reporter's Conference

Adelaide, Saturday 23 February 2002

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Firstly, I would like to thank the SRAA 2002 Organising Committee for providing me with the opportunity to speak here today.

My very first experience of captioning was back in 1981 at the local Deaf community hall. This was before the Australian Caption Centre was formed and captioning was unheard of in Australia. I had no idea what to expect of captioning. I can remember the experience like yesterday, the movie was "What's Up Doc?". What an eye opener it was!!!!!!

For the very first time, I was able to sit and understand the whole dialogue. My eyes were glued to the screen. I didn't pester my mother or my brothers to ask them what was going on, nor did I have to make up stories about what might have happened. I was able to sit and enjoy a movie in the same way my family did every day. It was indeed a luxury. Not just for me but for my family.

Today, the Captioning of Television, Movies and Cable TV is considered to be the Deaf person's right and provides us with unbelievable access to information, which is extremely vital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – the Information Age.

Up until 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2000, when the Broadcasting Services Act was implemented, Deaf people were only able to watch programs that the TV stations deemed appropriate. The main types of programs captioned were drama series, blockbuster movies, late night news and one current affairs program. Our choices were being determined by well meaning TV station executives who believed they were doing us a favour by providing us limited access to captions.

Six months prior to the introduction on the Broadcasting Services Act, I was telephoning executives from the TV networks to get an idea of how prepared they were to caption prime time television. Many of these executives were in denial and did not believe that they would have to caption programs. They quickly learnt that this legislation was for real.

From the 1st January 2000, with the introduction of the BSA, Deaf people have been able to access and enjoy a wide range of television programs. We are no longer at the mercy of the TV station executives who decide what programs Deaf people can watch. We can now watch any program is shown from 6pm – 10.30pm. For many Deaf people, this is a liberating and empowering experience.

## Quality

Since the introduction of the BSA, the quality of captions is now a big issue for the Deaf community. In particular, live captioning. AAD recognises that this area is still in its infancy

and there are not enough steno-captioners to do the amount of work that is available. I hope that Alex's presentation has inspired some of you to consider steno-captioning as a career.

Live captioning is based on the phonetics of what is spoken by the television presenter. The steno-captioner has a responsibility to ensure that all information is relayed from the speaker to a computer. This includes not only spoken words but also sounds such as a telephone ringing in the background or door knock that may be relevant to story. Once in the computer, it automatically transcribes the shorthand to English. The assistance of another steno-captioner is needed to iron out any errors that are not automatically corrected by the computer.

An example of the comedy of errors from live captioning is the captioning of the Sydney 2000 Olympics. The Olympics were captioned live from 6am to 10.30pm every day. This was probably the most ambitious captioning event that ever occurred. I have to say that Channel 7 did a fantastic job on this project and meant that Deaf people could enjoy the Olympics in the same way as the rest of Australia.

The captioning of the Olympics is particularly memorable for me as I had just delivered birth to a baby girl. I was in hospital during the second week of the Olympics and spent many hours watching the Olympics on a portable TV with Teletext. It certainly saved me from boredom.

The biggest challenge for the steno-captioners was the relaying of names of competitors from different countries around the world, including our own Australian athletes. With thousands of athletes from all countries, it was impossible for the captioners to have on hand all the names of the competitors to program into the computer beforehand.

Initially we all had a good laugh at some of the misspelt words and strange acronyms that appeared on our Television screens. After a while though, it became frustrating and tiresome. It also made it extremely difficult to understand what was being said – who was who, what did that mean etc. For many Deaf people, English is a second language, so having constant errors in captions makes it impossible to understand.

This world-class event took place 18 months ago, however, we are still experiencing these problems with live captioning. I want to highlight these issues here as it affects the way Deaf people can enjoy captioning. It also means that people wishing to enter into a career of steno-captioning need to understand the end user results and become more aware of what the requirements are from a user point of view.

The captioners, television networks and the Australian Caption Centre need to put more effort to ensure that captions are correct before they are transmitted to television sets in people's homes.

On Wednesday night's edition of Lateline, there were 10-15 spelling errors throughout the program. Here are a few examples of spelling errors from "Who wants to be a Millionaire" and "Lateline". I was originally going to show a video, which would be more effective but am conscious of time constraints.

You can see that you have to consciously think to find the appropriate word that should be here. Guer rue – means Guru – at least I think! Not sure what apeerg means in this example as I don't think it is part of the sentence.

At one point throughout the program Lateline showed a promo as a break between stories. During this promo the following sentence came up “and I recorded this interview before he left for the country.” I assumed this to refer to the interview with Senator Evans. As the show went on, a story came up about President Bush's tour of North Korea, then an interview with Alain Richard, French Foreign Minister. The earlier caption came up again and referred to the Interviewer on Lateline talking to the French Minister just before he returned to France.

There was also one case of missing captions, that came up later on but caused a backlog in transmission which created a captions coming hard and fast and creating a strain for the user to keep up.

These examples are minor but there have been more complex and frustrating examples. We are also aware that numbers relayed by television presenters do not always match the numbers that are captioned on television. These discrepancies need to be eliminated now. It is a concern for AAD and caption users that they are still occurring 18 months after live captioning became a regular thing on Australian Television.

I am sure Alex is sitting here today, well aware of these issues and I know the ACC is working hard to rectify them. However, the TV stations need to be more responsible and the captioners need to be more aware of the importance of correct transmission of captions. We would like to see a more pro-active approach from the Australian Broadcasting Authority, Federation of Australian Commercial Television Station (FACTS); the Australian Caption Centre; TV networks; Captioners and the Australian Association of the Deaf to resolve these issues to the satisfaction of all caption users.

The hurdles of managing modern technology and working in a young emerging area, is one of the huge challenges facing steno-captioners in their career.

## **The Future**

The Australian Association of the Deaf is working hard to lobby for all free-to-air television programs to be fully captioned by 2005. Our most immediate challenge is to work on getting captions on children's television by the end of the year.

My daughter, who is 16 months and is hearing, loves to watch programs such as: “Hi 5”, “Teletubbies” and “The Bear in the Big Blue House”. Unfortunately, I cannot share in her delight or support her in learning new things from television. She often points things out to me and I have to assume she is pointing to the bear or a visible object on television rather than the dialogue.

I have a copy of “The Wiggles” DVD has the dialogue interpreted Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and captioned. I am able to sing songs to her in my off-key Deaf voice. Her face lights up in delight. I am waiting for the day when she realizes her mum doesn't have a great singing voice – but for now its great!

All children's television should be captioned, not just for Deaf parents but also for Deaf children born to hearing parents. 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents and do not have access to Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Deaf children born to Deaf parents are exposed to Auslan at a very young age and quickly acquire language. However, as Auslan is a separate language to English with its own grammatical structure and syntax, Deaf children from Deaf families still need access to English.

All Deaf children face a significant communication and language barrier. Providing these children with access to children's television programs from a time they are a young age will be of great benefit to them. AAD believe that all children's television programs should be both captioned and interpreted in Australian Sign Language.

Given that the Captioning technology is now readily available in Australia, there is no excuse for Television networks not to increase the hours of captioning provided. Deaf people should be able to enjoy and even wider range of television programs in the same way as other people. Deaf people are all different and we all have different tastes in television. What you want to watch – we want to watch!

This will certainly create more employment and opportunities in the captioning field.

### **Other areas of captioning**

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity (HREOC) is conducting three separate inquiries into captioning issues for Deaf people. They are in the areas of free-to-air; cinema captioning and Pay TV. AAD is a member of each of the Forums set up to investigate captioning provision within these industries and ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. If people are interested in getting more information on these inquiries, please refer to the HREOC website – [www.hreoc.gov.au](http://www.hreoc.gov.au).

Live captioning in television is well and truly established. We believe that within the next 10 years, we will see a huge increase in the amount of types and settings for where captioning will be provided.

Currently at international conferences such as the World Federation for the Deaf Conference held in Brisbane in 1998, the ACC provides live captioning for conference participants. We are also seeing that in important Government meetings such as HREOC forums, people are requesting that live captioning be provided for Deaf participants.

In countries such as USA and the UK, live captioning is used in tertiary education settings.

With more and more Deaf children staying at school to complete their Higher School Certificate, we are seeing a demand for access to be provided in Tertiary settings. Traditionally, Deaf students have used notetakers and Auslan interpreters to assist them in the classroom. With live captioning emerging and improving all the time, there is no reason why this cannot be another option for people to choose for access provisions in the classroom.

Deaf people have different needs, some prefer notetakers, some prefer Auslan interpreters and some will prefer live captioning or even a combination of 2 or 3 methods. Deafness is

about communication, we need access to information and communication to ensure we can keep pace with the fast changing world that we live in.

The more demand there is for captioning, it is hoped that the costs of providing captions will decrease, thereby making it more accessible to the average Deaf person for use in a wide range of settings.

Steno-captioners will be given challenging and real opportunities for work in this field.